

birds with us all the year round, those who winter with us and nest, say in the Arctic regions, those who nest with us and go to warmer lands for the winter, those who nest in a north county and winter in a south. Then every county, every village almost, differs in its bird-life, and one learns gradually to know what inhabitants to expect on the moorland, the marsh, the down, in the copse, on the lake, on the heights, so that there is probably everywhere some new acquaintance to be made, and one might, after years of patient watching, be in a position to record the appearance of a rare bird or to establish some fact as to the habits of such a bird as the Cuckoo for example! The more one learns about birds the more one is struck by the fact that they are not the casual creatures one is apt to think them at first.

I would not, in conclusion, even suggest that anything appears in the dear Red Magazine which we do not read, but may I, in this connection, call attention to the charming Bird Studies which Miss L. Armitt gives us, for in them we get that introduction to the birds themselves which only a real lover and student of birds can give, because the introduction is given at first hand from a close personal acquaintance.

E. K.

BROWNING.

V.

I. BROWNING AS A PAINTER OF NATURE.

THIS is a phase in which we do not often see Browning. He dealt, as a rule, with men only, not with their surroundings, but when he does touch upon Nature he generally regards it merely as a setting for the human picture. In "Up at a villa, Down in the city," an Italian noble bemoans his fate, in being compelled through poverty to live in the country, the beauties of which he does not appreciate, comparing them with the busy stir of the town, concluding:

"Oh, a day in the city square! There's no such pleasure in life."

Perhaps this must not be taken too literally as an exact interpretation of Browning's own views, yet, to a certain extent, it shows his appreciation of town and country. He preferred to study man in relation to his fellow men rather than man in his relation to Nature. He belongs to the reaction against the undue prominence given to Nature by Wordsworth, Turner, and Ruskin, so he always considers Nature as second to man, and very seldom gives it a prominent position; when he does so he is generally least successful. He is not, by any means, without any love of Nature, and very often his allusions to it in short illustrations and introductions are very beautiful:

"A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall
From heaven to earth,—a sudden drawbridge lay,
Along which marched a myriad merry motes,
Mocking the flies that crossed them and recrossed
In rival dance."—*Ring and Book VII.*, 1225

In *Meeting at Night* there is a most beautiful and vivid picture of the sea at night:

"The grey sea and the long black land
And the yellow half-moon large and low,
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep."

It is in little touches such as these that Browning is at his best as a painter of Nature. He succeeds better with details than with a whole landscape. In *The Englishman in Italy* there is too much detail, which does not harmonize, so as to present a complete picture of the landscape to our view. The many details, though beautiful and accurately described in themselves, are not grouped round any one object, and thus the picture is vague, and the part of the poem which is most vivid is the description of a village festival. In *By the Fireside* we find the same thing. On reading it we have no clear picture of the Alpine scenery, but we have an accumulation of details, some of them very beautiful:

"These early November hours
That crimson the creeper's leaf across
Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss,
And lay it for show on the fairy-capped,
Elf-needled mat of moss."

In *Home Thoughts from Abroad* we have no description of an English landscape in April, yet how wonderful is his description of the thrush's "fine careless rapture," and also the suddenness of the knowledge that Spring has returned.

Browning is essentially a portrait-painter. He does not succeed well with landscapes, yet he does not ignore Nature, but, as in a portrait, the artist often puts in some slight touch of Nature to complete it, but which is completely subordinate to the central figure, and to which the attention is not primarily attracted, so Browning, with his word portraits, throws in small touches of Nature to add to their grace and charm.

II. BROWNING AS A MASTER OF MELODY.

At first sight Browning's verse does not appear to be melodious; it is very often unrhythmical; he seems incapable of sustained perfection of metre. Very little of what he has written is faultless in workmanship. His poems are a great contrast to those of Tennyson, whose verse is always melodious and easily flowing. It is said that their respective styles of reading poetry were characteristic of their methods of writing it. Tennyson paid almost too much attention to the rhythm, and read almost as though he were chanting.

With Browning it was quite different; he paid little attention to rhythm or metre; with him the *matter* was all-important, the *form* of no account. In reading Tennyson, one can go smoothly on from verse to verse without any stumbling-block in the way of perfect enjoyment of it, but with Browning, even in some of his most beautiful passages, there is constantly some false quantity, some defect of metre, which jars on the ear like a false note in music, and which seems to spoil one's pleasure in the poem. Yet this very fact goes to prove that there *is* melody in his poetry, otherwise we should not feel surprised and disappointed that it is not perfect. Often we find lines which, without being actually wrong, yet are clumsy and unmusical. Browning's poetry is perhaps at its best in his blank verse, but this is by no means free from the jarring element. In his other poems the rhymes are often forced and grotesque. Yet it would not be right to say that Browning was in no sense a master of melody, on the contrary, he had extremely high gifts of song, but he seems to let his subject outrun his style, instead of completely harmonizing the two. He does not carry out in his verse the principle which in *Fra Lippo* he insists must be applied to painting, and though we can all see the beauty of the *spirit* of his poetry, yet this is to some extent marred by the imperfections of the *form* through which it is revealed. Still we must remember that, as a rule, Browning's poetry is not descriptive but dramatic—he paints the strong emotions and passions of human nature. So we should not expect the same easy smoothness as we find in Tennyson's descriptive poems. Browning had great dramatic power in making the rhythm of a poem appropriate to its subject. This is especially noticeable in *How they brought the Good News*:

"I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three."

In these lines we feel that we can hear the sound of galloping horses, and it is the same all through the poem, and it is the same in *The Last Ride Together*.

In *The Laboratory*, in the very arrangement of the words, we can feel the strong passion of hate in the mind of the speaker, the broken lines showing her excitement. In contrast to this is the cheerful, calm, gently-flowing rhythm of *By the Fireside*—a celebration of happy, trustful love.

That Browning had a great love for music we know from his poems, especially *Abt Vogler*, and it seems rather surprising that he should not have made the music of his poems more technically perfect. Yet his melody is peculiar to himself. It has, in some of his poems, the quaint charm of Grieg; and, in spite of the occasional false notes and discords which prevent us from regarding him as a perfect master of melody, there are in his verses great powers of music, which we can see and appreciate more as we become more familiar with his works.

A. A. C.

EDITORIAL.

THIS number has been somewhat delayed, as we waited to ascertain the general opinion as to the advisability or otherwise of raising the subscription to 3/6. A meeting was held, most of the Committee members either attending or sending deputies to represent their year. The results are chronicled elsewhere by Miss Allen. It is hoped, however, that students and ex-students will bear in mind the objects of the Association, *i.e.*, to form a bond between all its members; and that the Magazine is only one of the means towards this end. It is hoped that Reading Unions, regular Students' Meetings, and any other plans that may be suggested, will be entered into with spirit.

Unfortunately Miss Magill finds it impossible to become Secretary to the Reading Union which has been started according to her suggestion in the last number. As, however, we cannot afford to lose any more time just now, you are asked to send your post-cards to the Editor, 62, Loampit Hill, Lewisham, S.E., *pro tem.*, and they will be forwarded to the Secretary of the Union, wherever she may be. The following are the rules of the Reading Union:—

1. Each member to study some subject of her own choosing and not necessarily having a direct bearing upon Education.
2. The subject chosen and the books used, together with any particulars that may help others who wish to take up the same line, and perhaps some epigrammatic remarks, to be written on a post-card and sent to the Editor by *May 30th*, beginning as early as you like.
3. The post-cards to be forwarded by the Editor to the Secretary of the Union, who shall select a certain number to be printed in the Magazine, *pour encourager les autres*.

Perhaps next time, when the Union has appointed a Secretary, some subjects may be set from which to choose. At